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*Geneva Daily Times*, Tuesday, August 8, 1961, p. 16

## **Inside Post – Baptist Cemetary<sup>[sic]</sup> Maintained**

Within the huge, mysterious island that is the Seneca Ordnance Depot, stands another - tiny, remote, and as startling a contrast to its surroundings as is the Depot itself.

Tucked away in the northwest corner of the sprawling 10,000 acre reservation stands the 150-plot cemetery of the once-flourishing First Baptist church of Romulus. Still operated on a modest scale, it exists as the only concrete relic of the pre-Depot days when the village of Kendaia was a well-settled region of vineyards.

Founded in 1795, the First Baptist church was uprooted by the Depot's establishment in 1941 and has been defunct now for more than a decade, but its old cemetery continues a dogged struggle against the influences of time and diminishing resources.

Outside the base, parts of the old Baptist Church Road remain in use. Inside the Depot, the road has become just another link in the Post's road system. On a gentle slope facing west towards Seneca Lake, the congregation built its church on the road in the early 19th century, finishing construction in 1810. For a century and more the church served the area's oldest families, whose members were baptised, wed and buried there, for generations.

A parsonage was built across the road, and in 1849, a facelifting project added a portico and colonial columns to the church building.

When the U. S. government decided to establish an ordnance depot in the area, it acquired the church property along with neighboring farms and land. The congregation was paid \$17,000 for the church building, \$5,000 for the parsonage and \$162.50, by condemnation for the cemetery and church land.

The congregation moved on to a former Episcopal church in Kendaia, but when the Navy took over another huge tract of land for Sampson, so few of the original church members remained in the area, that the congregation eventually disbanded in the later forties.

The church building itself remained in its quiet location for a time, used first as head quarters for Depot guards and later as a field dining room.

By 1952, when it was no longer in use and had deteriorated considerably, the federal government sold it for \$1 to G. L. Freeman of Old Irelandville, near Watkins Glen, who re-erected it as part of a 19th century village restoration. The old pews went to a Rochester synagogue and some of the stained glass windows were returned to the families of those in whose memory they had been given. A half-dozen of these, stored in a Romulus barn, now remain as the only vestige of the 130-year-old sanctuary.

But the three-and a quarter acre cemetery, with its 829 inhabitants, was allowed to survive. By agreement between the Depot and the Cemetery Association of the First Baptist Church and Society of Romulus, its operation can continue forever.

Although the burial rate has dwindled to fewer than a half-dozen per year, the family plots continue to fill up. A visit to the isolated location demonstrates that those buried there are not forgotten. Just after Memorial Day, many of the graves are adorned with wreaths, bouquets and new plants. Special markers identify the graves of U. S. Veterans, from all the wars of the past two centuries, including the revolutionary war.

Bordered by rows of tall maples, the cemetery is dotted here and there with tall white pines and hedges of blooming spirea.

The older half of the cemetery occupies the northern half of the plot. It is here that four-year-old John McMath Bainbridge, the first recorded burial, was laid to rest in April, 1812.

South of a grassy rectangle where the church building once stood lies the newer sections of the cemetery, where the most recent ceremony accompanied the burial of Mrs. Louis [Louise] C. Riegel [Reigle], 87, last April.

Between them lies other Bainbridges, McWhorters, Coryells, Kennedys, Sayres, Sebrings, Wilcoxes, Van Nostrands, Cranes, Thorpes, Simpsons, and a host of other old county names.

A minister, the Rev. Henry McClafferty, whose burial was the second recorded, was followed by 18 of his relatives in the years between 1814 and 1872. Haynes Bartlett, a soldier in the Revolutionary War, occupies one of the oldest graves.

Inscribed names like Charity and Temperance and Hiram and Silas bear testimony to change in fashionable nomenclature. A woman named Denarzade Cooley lies near another who crossed the ocean from her native Paisley, Scotland to live out her years and be buried in far away Seneca County.

Inscriptions on the headstones vary from simple notations of name, date and age to the flowery epitaph which adorns the tombstone of a local doctor, preacher and farmer, who died in 1858 at the age of "90 years and 9 months":

Here  
Lies all that's mortal  
of  
William W. Folwell  
Resting  
Till the Trump of God  
Shall Call  
The Waiting Millions  
to His Judgment Bar

Susan Meranda Bainbridge, who died in 1851 at the age of 25, is remembered with a more typically simple inscription: "Think of me as in Heaven".

One of the newer headstones adorns the grave of Philip S. Pontius, who died in 1959 after 20 years of service as the cemetery's caretaker. Depot staffers remember his frequent visits to the cemetery where he arrived with his horse and wagon to spend long hours at work on the plots. For a time, he was the only civilian ever entrusted with a key to the depot gate, allowing him unchaperoned entry.

The old cemetery is more than a historical institution. It continues normal operations under the watchful care of the association's secretary-treasure, Mark Baldrige of Romulus RD 1, and his neighbor and association president, Archie McWhorter.

No eight-grave family lots have been sold since 1941, since the government owns the land, but relatives of established lot owners may be buried there as long as space exists.

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Under terms of the agreement with the depot, the cemetery association is completely responsible for the cemetery's upkeep. The Depot requires 24-hour advance notice of burials, maintains a fence around the cemetery to keep resident deer from damaging the grounds and headstones, allows easy access for burial parties and visitors, and mows the grass where the church once stood. There its responsibility ends, and the rest of the problems are the association's.

Baldrige's difficulties increase as time passes and surviving relatives of those buried in the cemetery die off. Modest operation funds for upkeep, repairs, and burial costs derive from perpetual care funds set up years ago and still drawing interest, and from \$3 per lot assessments made annually where surviving relatives can be located. Baldrige mails these notices out every year to places as far away as California and Wisconsin, and he reports generally faithful response.

A growing problem is caretaking help. Occasional hired labor is used for general maintenance, but Baldrige is finding it more and more difficult to find grave-diggers at \$35 per grave.

Baldrige inherited his duties when his father died in the forties after 50 years of similar service to the cemetery. He is worried and apprehensive about the cemetery's future. "After a few more deaths within our ranks, I don't know who will take the responsibility for the cemetery's upkeep."

Mr. Baldrige is a well-known area beekeeper, and generally serves the state government as apiary inspector in 10 or 12 counties every summer.

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Transcribed by Virginia Peterson  
vtpeterson@prodigy.net  
10 January 2023

# Baptist Cemetary Maintained

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The congregation moved on to a former Episcopal church in Kendall, but when the Navy took over another huge tract of land for Sampson, so few of the original church members remained in the area, that the congregation eventually disbanded in the later forties.

The church building itself remained in its quiet location for a time used first as headquarters for Depot guards and later as a field dining room.

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## Depot Property

(Continued from Page 15)

Chief of the Depot Property Branch is called upon for all kinds of decisions concerning supplies or equipment for post operations. An example—should a division head decide a desk should be replaced, he calls Depot Property. They first

Because steel was getting more and more scarce in those war years, and even wooden desks a scarce item, the carpenter shop was called on to fabricate desks and chairs. "It best sitting on a keg of mule" Mrs. Daywalt laughingly commented. Need for officers in the field caused rapid changes